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Enhancing and restricting factors of formal voluntary engagement in Tyrol and the impact of the pandemic

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Purpose: The insurmountable tensions and turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in welfare systems worldwide demand governmental as well as non-governmental support, especially from the volunteer sector, which can be a powerful resource for mitigating the pandemic's impacts. To identify ways of mobilising the enormous human resources of the baby boomer generation in particular, whose members are currently on the brink of entering retirement, the factors that have enabled and restricted volunteer management during the pandemic in Tyrol, Austria are examined.

Design/method/approach: Following a qualitative approach, the authors performed 27 problem-centred interviews with representative senior citizens, retirees and individuals about to retire and companies in Tyrol. The authors evaluated the data in qualitative content analysis.

Findings: Self-determination, time flexibility, acceptance of volunteer work in one's social network and previous personal experience with volunteering are key determinants of sustainable volunteer work amongst retirees. Companies and a well-established acquisition management strategy also play a significant role in promoting volunteer work.

Practical implications and originality/value: The study involves a holistic analysis of volunteer work at the individual and organisational levels. By capturing the potential of e-volunteering and how it improves the capacities of classic face-to-face volunteer work, it can support the development of more resilient infrastructures for supporting volunteer work.

Research limitations/future research: The interpretation of visual and non-verbal signals was difficult due to the use of phone and online interviews, and the results should not be generalised. Even so, our findings pave the way for future studies on mechanisms determining virtual volunteering and volunteer management.

Paper type: Empirical

Keywords: medical decision making, decision biases, clinical debiasing strategies.

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Фактори, що стимулюють та обмежують волонтерський рух в Тіролі, та вплив пандемії

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Мета роботи: Непереборна напруженість і заворушення, викликані пандемією COVID-19 в системах соціального забезпечення по всьому світу, вимагають як державної, так і неурядової підтримки, особливо з боку волонтерського сектора, що може стати потужним ресурсом для пом'якшення наслідків пандемії. Щоб визначити способи мобілізації величезних людських ресурсів, зокрема, покоління бебі-бумерів, яке в даний час планує вихід на пенсію, досліджуються фактори, що стимулюють і обмежують волонтерське управління під час пандемії в Тіролі, Австрія.

Дизайн/метод/підхід дослідження: Дотримуючись якісного підходу, автори провели 27 проблемно-орієнтованих інтерв'ю з літніми людьми, пенсіонерами та людьми, які збираються вийти на пенсію, та компаніями в Тіролі. Автори оцінили дані за допомогою якісного контент-аналізу.

Результати дослідження: Самовизначення, гнучкість у часі, прийняття волонтерської роботи в соціальній мережі і попередній особистий досвід волонтерської діяльності є ключовими факторами, що визначають стійку волонтерську роботу серед пенсіонерів. Компанії і стратегія управління волонтерством, яка вже добре себе зарекомендувала, також відіграють важливу роль в просуванні волонтерської роботи.

Практичне значення і оригінальність/цінність дослідження: Дослідження включає цілісний аналіз волонтерської роботи на індивідуальному та організаційному рівнях. З огляду на потенціал е-волонтерства і то, як воно покращує можливості класичної особистої волонтерської роботи, воно може підтримати розвиток більш стійких інфраструктур для підтримки волонтерської роботи.

Обмеження дослідження/майбутні дослідження: Інтерпретація візуальних і невербальних сигналів була складною через використання телефонних і онлайн-інтерв'ю, і результати не слід узагальнювати. Проте, результати відкривають шлях для майбутніх досліджень механізмів, що визначають віртуальне волонтерство та управління волонтерством.

Тип статті: Емпірична

Ключові слова: управління волонтерами; покоління бебі-бумерів; е-волонтерство.

Стимулирующие и ограничивающие факторы волонтерского движения в Тироле и влияние пандемии

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Цель работы: Непреодолимая напряженность и беспорядки, вызванные пандемией COVID-19 в системах социального обеспечения по всему миру, требуют как государственной, так и неправительственной поддержки, особенно со стороны волонтерского сектора, что может стать мощным ресурсом для смягчения последствий пандемии. Чтобы определить способы мобилизации огромных человеческих ресурсов, в частности, поколения бэби-бумеров, которое в настоящее время планирует выход на пенсию, исследуются факторы, стимулирующие и ограничивающие волонтерское управление во время пандемии в Тироле, Австрия.

Дизайн/метод/подход исследования: Следуя качественному подходу, авторы провели 27 проблемно-ориентированных интервью с пожилыми людьми, пенсионерами и людьми, которые собираются выйти на пенсию, и компаниями в Тироле. Авторы оценили данные с помощью качественного контент-анализа.

Результаты исследования: Самоопределение, гибкость во времени, принятие волонтерской работы в социальной сети и предыдущий личный опыт волонтерской деятельности являются ключевыми факторами, определяющими устойчивую волонтерскую работу среди пенсионеров. Компании и хорошо зарекомендовавшая себя стратегия управления приобретениями также играют важную роль в продвижении волонтерской работы.

Практическое значение и оригинальность/ценность исследования: Исследование включает целостный анализ волонтерской работы на индивидуальном и организационном уровнях. Учитывая потенциал е-волонтерства и то, как оно улучшает возможности классической личной волонтерской работы, оно может поддержать развитие более устойчивых инфраструктур для поддержки волонтерской работы.

Ограничения исследования/будущие исследования: Интерпретация визуальных и невербальных сигналов была сложной из-за использования телефонных и онлайн-интервью, и результаты не следует обобщать. Тем не менее, наши результаты открывают путь для будущих исследований механизмов, определяющих виртуальное волонтерство и управление волонтерством.

Тип статьи: Эмпирическая

Ключевые слова: управление волонтерами; поколение бэби-бумеров; е-волонтерство.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic's direct and indirect impacts on social and economic structures have caused rapid changes over the world, including Austria (Kittel *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, as the global economy plunged into the deepest recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Fenz *et al.*, 2021), so did Austria's national economy. There and elsewhere around the world, the pandemic has posed serious challenges in all fields of welfare – social services, healthcare, labour services and unemployment services – as well as for individuals and families. As François Dubet describes it, COVID-19 has forced us to rediscover society (Dubet, 2021) and, in some time, will most likely exacerbate inequalities and poverty globally.

To be sure, due to social stratification, individuals and households of disparate socio-economic status have varying capacities for the intensity, resilience and stamina needed to continue observing practices to prevent and mitigate COVID-19 (Prosser *et al.*, 2020). According to a list of at-risk populations identified by the United Nations (2020), older adults, women, migrants and people with disabilities are more at risk of being adversely affected by the pandemic than the rest of the population and thus need special attention as COVID-19 runs its course. In Austria, the pandemic has also hit vulnerable groups far harder than the rest of the population (Kittel *et al.*, 2020; Pieh, Budimir, & Probst, 2020; Traunmüller *et al.*, 2020b), and though the country's welfare system is resilient and well-equipped (Hussain, 2016; Schraad-Tischler *et al.*, 2017), its services have been under intense pressure during the COVID-19 crisis. In fact, in an immediate response to lockdowns, governmental and non-governmental welfare providers have had to either scale or shut down their services in order to comply with COVID-19 security measures (Carlsen, Toubøl, & Brincker, 2020).

Amongst traditional indicators of robust welfare systems – poverty prevention, labour market access, health and education – its engagement with civil society (Burmester & Wohlfahrt, 2016) assumes an especially important role in times of crisis (Simsa, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has not only created profound difficulties in providing social services (Comas-Herrera *et al.*, 2020) and social work (Amadasun, 2020) but has also increased the care burden of women and families (Power, 2020) and worsened disparities for disadvantaged groups in education systems (Murphy & Wyness, 2020). Volunteering in health care related areas is a crucial part of the Austrian welfare system, most obvious in the number of 3528 hospice and palliative care volunteers in 2016 (Pelttari & Pissarek, 2018). This specific sector was confronted with a break in patient interaction during the pandemic as Pawłowski & Leppert (2021) identified a significant reduction of utilization of volunteer work in palliative care, supported by findings by Oluyase *et al.* (2021). The pressure on the health care system during the pandemic is enormous and the toll healthcare workers are substantially paid (Mehta *et al.*, 2021).

Because public resources are not as flexible and numerous as needed to cope with the pandemic's impacts, volunteer work has increasingly received attention as a potential source of support. Especially in recent years, a shift to more flexible, project-based forms of volunteer work has been pursued (McLennan, Whittaker, & Handmer, 2016), which may also support ways of coping with and mobilising sufficient human capital for the pandemic's current and upcoming challenges. The baby boomer generation, including the large birth cohorts from 1955 to 1969, has begun to demonstrate its tremendous potential for the volunteer sector as its members have started to retire (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020; Pettigrew *et al.*, 2019). In fact, because volunteer work presents the opportunity to enhance healthy ageing (Carr & Hendricks, 2011; Jongenelis *et al.*, 2019; Niebuur *et al.*, 2018; Pavelek, 2013), retirees can benefit from a

strong volunteer sector as much as a welfare regime and its society.

Considering all of the above, we sought to examine the ways of managing sufficient acquisition strategies and to identify factors that enable and restrict volunteer work among retirees and people about to retire. This article introduces the volunteer sector in Austria and its implications, discusses issues in managing volunteers at an organisational level as well as motivational factors amongst individuals and explains the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the current landscape of volunteer work.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Volunteer work and its dynamics in Austria

Formally, volunteer work refers to any contribution of unpaid time to an organisation or another established entity (Lee & Brudney, 2009). According to that definition, 31% of Austria's population is engaged in formal volunteer work. As shown in Fig. 1, the greatest rate of formal volunteer engagement, 38%, occurring in the 60–69-year-old age group (Feistritz, 2019; IFES (Institute for Empirical Social Research), 2016), highlights the outstanding potential of baby boomers¹ for volunteering, given their current or impending retirement, relatively good health and skills from former professions that remain applicable in volunteer work (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020).

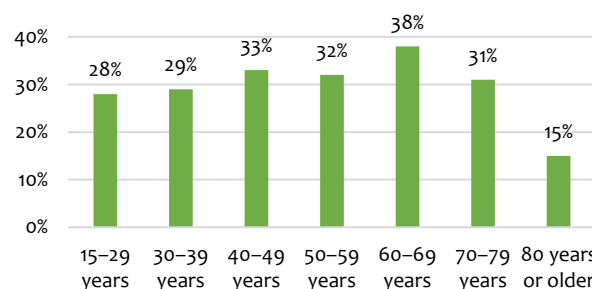


Figure 1: Proportion of formal volunteer engagement in Austria by age group in 2016

Source: Authors' representation based on numbers from IFES (2016)

In the Austrian state of Tyrol, about 52% of the population are engaged in formal volunteer work, it is a significantly higher rate of participation than the national average has (IFES, 2016). One of the reasons is the fact that Tyrol's Volunteer Partnership and volunteer centres are in each of its nine districts, all of which are involved in organising and developing the landscape of volunteering in Tyrol. Of course, that clear structural advantage for fostering volunteer work benefits from also fostering drivers of the likelihood to be engaged in such work, including previous experience with volunteering (Ehlers, Naegele, & Reichert, 2011; Niebuur *et al.*, 2018), good socio-economic status (Hank & Erlinghagen, 2010; Niebuur *et al.*, 2018) and good health (Ehlers *et al.*, 2011; Pavelek, 2013).

Moving forward, the societal ageing process and rising rates of retirement will impact social, economic and political structures all over the world (OECD, 2013). Although both trends endanger the sustainability of Austria's welfare state as well as social benefits for older adults (Carr & Hendricks, 2011), they also stand to fuel sociocultural changes, including the increased involvement of older adults in society (Reidlinger, 2011). At the same time, whereas the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic poses great challenges for Austria's social system (Kittel *et al.*, 2020), the volunteer sector shows exceptional promise for bringing about dynamic social and digital changes as it is becoming increasingly visible amid a growing

¹ In Austria, baby boomers are defined as members of the generation born from 1955 to 1969 (Meier, 2019; Wanka, 2019).

demand for flexible, episodic, project-based forms of volunteer work (McLennan et al., 2016), a trend that applies especially to the baby boomer generation (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). As new forms of volunteering, including digital ones, are becoming more relevant (McLennan et al., 2016), they at once pose challenges and opportunities. Therefore, it is crucial to have systems in place and strategies at hand for handling not only critical events such as the COVID-19 pandemic but also structural changes.

2.2. Volunteer management

Well-planned volunteer programmes help to recruit more volunteers (Reamon, 2016) and are crucial for a sustainable volunteering environment (Healy et al., 2008). An effective volunteer programme is important not only for volunteer organisations but also for companies engaged in corporate volunteering, or employee volunteering, defined as a societal commitment observed by employees (Beschoner & Schank, 2012). Corporate volunteering also often serves as a launchpad for companies to begin practising corporate social responsibility (Dreesbach-Bundy & Scheck, 2018).

Generally, the process of volunteer management involves three major phases – the recruitment, engagement and retention of volunteers – all of which have become even more challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Lachance, 2020). Once the purpose of a volunteer programme is established and its plan for execution is developed, it is essential to accept volunteers (i.e. recruitment) and determine how they will be used (i.e. engagement). Last, the retention of volunteers depends upon the first developing clear objectives and later directly involving volunteers and other stakeholders in developing the programme. Thus, the phases of recruitment and retention cannot be separated and should occur

simultaneously, ideally by beginning to apply retention strategies upon first meeting a new potential volunteer (Kappelides, Cuskelly, & Hoyer, 2018; Reamon, 2016).

2.3. Implementing the group socialisation model in volunteer management

According to Reamon (2016), the group socialisation model can be applied to volunteer management as a means to successfully build and sustain relationships and to improve recruitment and retention. The model derives from the findings by Levine and Moreland (1994), who identified five stages of volunteer management to explain the changing dynamics between individuals and their groups: investigation (i.e. recruiting, screening and interviewing), socialisation (i.e. identifying volunteer orientations), maintenance (i.e. maximising contributions and promoting emotional involvement), resocialisation (i.e. renewing commitment to the organisation) and remembrance (i.e. retirement). Overall, the model highlights the importance of building relationships between the organisation and volunteers at every stage and to examine and consider each volunteer's motivation from the outset (Reamon, 2016). Because motivation is a crucial component in volunteer management, it is worth discussing one of the most influential theories on the topic: the functional approach to volunteerism, a multidimensional construct that represents the complexity of motives for volunteer work (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Güntert et al., 2016; Snyder, Clary, & Stukas, 2000). Based on six chief functions, the functional approach assumes that volunteers can have a variety of motivations for engaging in volunteer work (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Snyder et al., 2000), as detailed in Tab. 1.

Table 1: Six chief functions of volunteering

Function	Definition
Values function	Volunteering to express personal values and concern for others (e.g. doing something that is important to oneself)
Career function	Volunteering to have career-related advantages (e.g. developing skills and career-related networking)
Social function	Volunteering to strengthen social relationships and meet social expectations and norms (e.g. feeling social pressure to volunteer)
Understanding function	Volunteering to learn about oneself and/or the world or to learn new skills (e.g. learning about one's strengths)
Protective function	Volunteering to keep oneself occupied and thus from engaging in destructive behaviour (e.g. reducing feelings of guilt for being better off than others)
Enhancement function	Volunteering to improve self-worth and thus self-esteem (e.g. feeling needed)

Sources: Clary and Snyder (1999), Snyder et al. (2000)

According to a meta-analysis by Okun and Schultz (2003), the social function becomes more important for older adults as career and understanding lose importance, whereas the values function is the most important function across all age groups (Okun & Schultz, 2003). Thus, the first task of volunteer management is to accommodate developments such as project-based volunteer work, the ageing of society and digitalisation and, by extension, the shifting importance of the six functions. The second challenge is to respond to current, sudden exogenous impacts (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic) and maintain a social net to evolve, transform and establish sustainable development, even out of such crises. Last, when reflecting on the group socialisation model of volunteer management and the key components of motivation, it is imperative to understand the ways of managing a sufficient acquisition strategy for volunteers in changing, challenging times. For such an understanding, factors that enable and restrict volunteer work for retirees and people about to retire, both in general and under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, need to be identified.

3. Data and methods

Our research followed a qualitative design, which allowed us to refer to narratives and experiences (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012) while observing a flexible, adaptive, less structured research procedure (Braun, Clarke, V., & Gray, 2017), all to clarify the deeper causes behind the problem being studied and its consequences (Flyvbjerg, 2006). To enhance our study's quality, we strove for Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria of quality: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. We also ensured intercoder reliability (Mayring, 2014) by hosting weekly peer debriefing sessions during data collection and data analysis. In total, we conducted 27 qualitative, problem-centred expert interviews (Witzel & Reiter, 2012) following an open, explorative approach with attention to narrative elements (Scheibelhofer, 2008). The literature review served as a basis for setting thematic priorities for the interviews without having to establish a rigid interview guide, which ultimately strengthened our exploratory approach. The thematic topics addressed in the expert interviews included challenges with volunteer work and acquisition management in the five phases (1) introduction and thematic frame, (2) recruitment, (3) engagement, (4) retention and finally (5) outlook, final statement, closure and recap. Each phase

contained specific topics associated with the literature as displayed in *Tab. 2*. The thematic blocks served as a rough orientation but should not restrict the conversation, depending to the interviewees there was no stringent chronology to thematise the

content. For example, it happened that after the first phase some of the interviewees jumped right to COVID-19 and other topics were discussed later on.

Table 2: Thematic blocks associated with the literature

Phase	Thematic topics
1. Introduction and Thematic Frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First acquaintance, biography (Hank & Erlinghagen 2010; Pavelek, 2013) • Experiences with volunteer work (Ehlers et al., 2011; Niebuur et al., 2018) • Current trends in and challenges of volunteer work (Carr & Hendricks, 2011; Reidlinger, 2011; McLennan et al., 2016; Jongenelis et al., 2019; Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020) • Current frameworks of volunteer work in Tyrol
2. Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation (volunteers) (Beschorner & Schank, 2012) • Strategies (professionals) (Healy et al., 2008; Reamon, 2016) • Incentives for companies and individuals (Dreesbach-Bundy & Scheck, 2018)
3. Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation (volunteers) (Beschorner & Schank, 2012) • Strategies (professionals) (Healy et al., 2008; Reamon, 2016) • Different functions of volunteer work (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Güntert et al., 2016; Snyder et al., 2000) • The potential for volunteer work amongst baby boomers (Okun & Schultz, 2003) • Differences between urban and rural areas • Best practices in volunteering
4. Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation (volunteers) (Levine and Moreland, 1994) • Strategies (professionals) (Kappelides et al., 2018; Reamon, 2016) • Best practices in volunteering
5. Final statement, Outlook, Closure and Recap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the landscape of volunteering (Burmester & Wohlfahrt, 2016; Simsa, 2017; Lachance, 2020; Pawłowski & Leppert, 2021) • Collaborations to improve volunteer work

Source: developed by the authors.

The collection of data followed a two-step process of interviewing experts as well as experts by experience. We defined *experts* as “people with learned expertise” and *experts by experience* as “people with lived experience”, as proposed by Orton (2019, p. 132). Subsequently, theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation (Bluff, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1996) were the guiding principles for establishing a maximum contrasting sample (Witzel, 2000). The first step of the process was interviewing experts in volunteer work, economics and social services; that sample of experts represented seven umbrella institutions in Tyrol, including two associations representing senior citizens, the Austria Chamber of Commerce, two volunteer centres, the Volunteer Partnership, the Tyrolean Benevolent Fund and an expert in volunteer work in Tyrol. In the second step, retirees and people about to retire, along with representatives at the managerial level of organisations in Tyrol, were interviewed as experts by experience. The sample of retirees and people about to retire included people who had retired in the last 2 years and people who planned to retire in the next 2 years. The final sample thus included eight retirees and people who were about to retire.

For companies, the selection criteria were based on the industry or sector and the company's size. The final sample included 10 companies from the social services sector, the transport industry, the glass industry, the information technology industry, the energy industry, the wood-based materials industry and the public services sector. By size, the companies ranged from a two-man business to an organisation with approximately 10,000 employees. *Tab. 3* shows the distribution of the sample by experts, retirees and people about to retire and companies.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed following relevant ethical standards and considerations, after which the transcripts were subjected to qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2014). The aim of the content analysis was to reduce material to a comprehensive level while maintaining the essential content, which we achieved by developing a system of categories (Mayring, 2014), defined as classes of statements representing the principal objects of our research (Mayring, 2014). Most categories were established prior to coding and drew from the theory and literature, which amounted to a deductive approach. Nevertheless, a couple of categories were established inductively, namely by

formulating new categories from the interview material, in order to create and confirm new theories (Gläser & Laudel, 2019).

4. Results

Results from the interviews afford insights into the different areas of volunteer management, starting with individual and contextual aspects of opportunities and challenges with involving people in formal volunteer work.

For example, if my neighbour was sick, then I would take care of her for as long as she was sick. [I am open to] Just helping out when I'm needed without fully committing myself to some other type of volunteer work.

Informal volunteer work is widespread, varied and difficult to measure. Although it fulfils different needs for support across society, it is challenging to manage and depends upon the individual social network. Beyond that, the most vulnerable groups in society may not benefit from such informal structures. As discussed above, volunteer management has to react to trends (e.g. the rise of project-based volunteer work) and societal changes (e.g. the ageing of society). As represented by the previous quotation, our interviewees value a certain amount of freedom, flexibility with time and self-determination during their retirement as well as in their volunteer work. Therefore, recruiting often means providing nothing less than a formal structure that generates the benefits of informal volunteer work:

I really enjoy spending my time however I want. [...] I don't want to commit to something that requires me to be at a certain place at a certain time.

Now we [baby boomers] are finally retiring. Now we want to enjoy our freedom.

Since I've retired, every day has passed so fast. [...] That's really how it is. I have a lot to do.

Table 3: Distribution of the sample

			Absolute (n)
Experts	Total		9
	Distribution by gender	Men	3
		Women	6
	Total		8
	Age: M (SD), range		62 (1,36), 60–64
Retirees and people about to retire	Distribution by gender	Men	3
		Women	5
	Distribution by highest level of education	Doctorate or equivalent	1
		Master's or equivalent	2
		Bachelor's or equivalent	0
		Post-secondary, non-tertiary education	1
		Upper secondary education	2
		Lower secondary education	2
	Distribution by retirement status	Retired	6
		Not retired	2
Companies	Total		10
	Industry or sector	Social & health sector	2
		Transport industry	2
		Glass industry	1
		Information technology industry	1
		Energy industry	1
		Wood-based materials industry	1
		Public services sector	2
	Number of employees	1–9	1
		10–49	0
		50–249	3
		250–999	1
		>1000	5
	Position of the interviewee	Department manager	1
		Managing director	3
		Director	1
		Human resources manager	3
		Owner	1
		Chairman of the Works Council	1

Source: developed by the authors.

Volunteer organisations are thus confronted with assuming the role of a host organisation by offering volunteer positions that can be highly flexible and do not require specific, time-intensive training. Short-term volunteer activities, however, can increase rates of participation not only in volunteer organisations but also in companies that participate in corporate volunteer activities. That arrangement offers the companies a more flexible way of organising the projects that their employees want to engage in. It can also boost the participation of employees provided that their employers offer flexible work times:

We [our company] have an electronic time-recording system with very little core time. That means that the employees can organise their work with a lot of flexibility, except for mandatory times when they're supposed to be on duty or in the office.

A work environment that supports formal volunteer work before retirement is also crucial, for some retirees want to use their professional skills during retirement to help others:

In this third stage of life [...], I can give back to society by using part of the skills that I acquired throughout my life. That's a key factor for me.

Experts further stressed the relevance of non-monetary incentives or rewards to volunteers to show appreciation. The non-monetary aspect is important as monetary incentives will send wrong signals. Respondents mentioned a broad range of possibilities, from granting titles to volunteers, awarding certificates, offering volunteers the participation in trainings (e.g. first-aid course for free) as well as social rewards or non-monetary rewards such as compensating transportation costs.

In our sample, the subjectively felt social responsibility to give something back in retirement emerged as a common reason to volunteer. Retirees with work experience in the social sector and people experienced with volunteer work seemed more prone to participate in volunteer activities again:

I used to work in a social institution with clients. When I retired, I kept supporting some clients on a voluntary basis.

Those motivations are important to consider when recruiting volunteers and when determining volunteering options and the duration of engagement.

Added to those motivations, the mentioned functions of volunteering also come into focus, especially personal values and experiences that drive people to volunteer:

You know, I've always been an outsider. I got teased by other kids and grew up in difficult conditions. Therefore, I've always wanted to help people who are vulnerable.

In our sample, factors driving volunteer work amongst retirees were based on intrinsic motivation (e.g. having a positive impact on our world, social responsibility), contextual embeddedness (e.g. family responsibilities and health restrictions), the enhancement function (e.g. coming to terms with oneself), the social function (e.g. being asked by other people to help), the protective function (e.g. feeling bad for not helping) and the desire for social justice. While several interviews stated that their volunteer work was independent from their social network others stated that their volunteer engagement was impacted by role models within their social network:

Volunteer work is a fixed component in my family. [...] This definitely influenced me, of course. Let's say, there are role models.

On the contrary, lacking acceptance or support for volunteer work within one's social networks is also described as a deterrent for volunteering:

[...] some of my friends' husbands said, they don't want their wives to volunteer.

Additionally, the understanding function (e.g. getting to know oneself better) is identified as a relevant function, for retirees are liable to seek out new challenges in life:

Doing something new in retirement would be interesting, because even at 60 you can still do a variety of things.

The willingness to volunteer seems to have risen in response to situations with an obvious need for helping hands, such as during the COVID-19 crisis, but often meets certain restraints:

I would really like to volunteer again, actually. But due to the corona virus it is not possible for me, it is too dangerous and with my diseases I am part of the risk group.

Fear, uncertainty and self-protection due to COVID-19 were only a few reasons why retirees in our sample reported wanting to avoid their established or new forms of volunteer work. In that situation, understanding the motivational factors of potential volunteers in the baby boomer generation can support volunteer managers with recruiting but also with engaging and retaining volunteers under so-called "normal" social conditions. It can also clarify how fragile the system is under circumstances such as social distancing and the overriding focus on protecting older adults and other vulnerable people. Those circumstances demand well-established management processes, such as those derived from the group socialisation model, for a culture of appreciation, positive feedback loops, trust and good relations between volunteer organisations and volunteers themselves often depends on physical, face-to-face interactions.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Although the landscape of volunteering in Tyrol is well-established, the core, traditionally organised volunteer sector has shown some friction and fragility during the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering those trends, we have organised our results into two dimensions: general insights into volunteer management and dimensions specific to COVID-19.

5.1. General insights into volunteer management

Motivations for engaging in volunteer work found in our study largely match findings reported in the literature. It is also identified in our study that past experiences have been described as a key determinant for engaging in volunteer work during retirement (Ehlers et al., 2011; Niebuur et al., 2018). We further identified the six chief functions of the functional approach (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Snyder et al., 2000) as being important, except for the career function. Interviewees never mentioned that function, perhaps because motivations typically change over the life course and because career-related ones are less relevant to retirees than to younger people (Okun & Schultz, 2003).

At the same time, against the findings from the meta-analysis performed by Okun and Schultz (2003), several interviewed retirees stated that their volunteer work was entirely independent of their social network. Nevertheless, the lack of acceptance of volunteer work in one's social network was identified as a restricting factor for volunteer work by interviewees as well as by participants in Pavelek's (2013) study. Incentivising factors mentioned by interviewees, by contrast, include the motivation to make a positive difference in the world, a sense of social responsibility,

past personal experience with volunteering and awareness of the respective issue addressed by the specific volunteer work.

Because rates of intrinsic motivations for volunteer work are high, recruitment does not seem to be the major problem. Nevertheless, some experts proposed offering trial runs for potential volunteers or having volunteering role models and ambassadors (e.g. politicians, family members, companies and peer volunteers) to raise awareness for volunteer work. Even then, maintaining engagement continues to be difficult and critically needs a well-organised onboarding process. On top of that, showing appreciation for volunteers and acknowledging their valuable work with, for example, non-monetary rewards or professional mentoring opportunities for volunteers should be common practices. Compensating volunteers for costs that arise during volunteer work or providing volunteer insurance are additional ways to enhance the process of volunteer management.

Other common deterrents for volunteering are the health impairments of potential volunteers (Ehlers et al., 2011; Pavelek, 2013). Our sample reported such impairments, especially among the 70–79-year-old age group, in a result confirmed by the Austrian volunteering survey (IFES, 2016). Those circumstances prompted us to identify the second dimension of our findings.

5.2. Understanding volunteer management specific to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced governmental and non-governmental welfare providers alike to maintain only a minimum of social services, while some services have had to be entirely cancelled (Amadasun, 2020; Carlsen et al., 2020; Comas-Herrera et al., 2020). Women (Power, 2020) and vulnerable groups have been hit disproportionately harder by the effects of the pandemic (Kittel et al., 2020; Murphy & Wyness, 2020; Pieh et al., 2020; Traunmüller et al., 2020a), which has provided even more reasons to mobilise volunteers in response. However, though retirees and people about to retire are available in sufficient numbers, they have also been identified as the most vulnerable group to health-related risks due to COVID-19 (Powell, Bellin, & Ehrlich, 2020). In the course of the interviews, it became obvious that flexibility with time and self-determination are highly valued by baby boomers, as consistent with other findings indicating project-based volunteer work as a possible response to that development (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020; McLennan et al., 2016).

An essential way for taking those considerations into account is by adapting e-volunteering tools, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as digital opportunities for volunteer work are sorely lacking in Tyrol. Also known as online volunteering and virtual volunteering, e-volunteering is a diversified way of helping that offers the flexible possibility of volunteering online from home (Kramer, Lewis, & Gossett, 2013) and therefore reduces travel times and costs. The time-saving aspect may seem especially appealing to the baby boomer generation, whose time tends to be occupied. It might also reduce barriers for older adults living in rural areas with limited mobility (Esmond, 2001) and opens up the possibility of including people with disabilities (Lachance, 2020). Nevertheless, Smith, Stebbins, & Grotz (2017) have argued that the absence of social and emotional contact with others may severely limit the appeal and impact of in-person volunteering. Onyx and Warburton (2003) have also found that volunteering roles performed face to face have the strongest positive effects on volunteers. Despite those findings, e-volunteering has gained significant attention due to the COVID-19 pandemic and can have positive outcomes for volunteer management and volunteers while continuing to respect imposed measures for social distancing (Lachance, 2020). Even if e-volunteering at some point becomes exclusive due to the requirements for hardware and infrastructure, it bears the potential to relieve other areas in social services, because online support can be provided flexibly and just in time.

Last, the retirees and people about to retire in our sample showed special interest in using their professional skill set in volunteer

work. Given that interest, in times of crises the welfare system and the volunteer sector could extend classic volunteer management strategies by adding online-based *crowdtasking*, defined as the management of qualified volunteers in order to obtain specific skill sets, information or support (Middelhoff et al., 2016; Neubauer et al., 2013; Orloff, 2011) to manage and handle critical situations. Combining classic volunteer management with e-volunteering and aspects of *crowdtasking* could serve to establish a resilient system of volunteer work that is well-equipped for transforming society and especially suited for critical situations. In the wake of the pandemic and focusing on volunteering in health care, Radbruch et al. (2020, p.1467) suggest “enlisting informal networks of community-based and faith-based organisations to mobilise and train a citizen volunteer workforce that is ready and able to teleconnect with patients in need of basic social support, delivering on palliative care’s cornerstone feature – compassionate care”. Nakagawa et al. (2020, p.1683) outline the benefits of a “virtual consultation model staffed by out-of-state palliative care specialist volunteers” to support the medical care structure of regions under severe pressure caused by the pandemic. Nevertheless, even before the pandemic, Chirico et al. (2021) found in 2019 a higher prevalence for a burnout syndrome among Italian volunteers of the Red Cross. They conclude that volunteers from emergency care are at higher risk than volunteers involved in non-healthcare, social and administrative activities. Based on a review of literature on mental health of all kinds of volunteers after working in disasters, Thormar et al. (2010) additionally point out that volunteers show more signs of stress compared to professionals, indicating the need of a well-organized structure of volunteer management containing offers of training, practice, follow-up care and social support. The current experiences during the pandemic and the scientific findings urge the necessity for thinking about structural changes to establish a more efficient and resilient volunteer management in Tyrol.

Amongst our study’s limitations, the results and insights presented herein are based on qualitative data, because generalisation was not our primary aim. On the contrary, we wanted to illustrate how social benefits, even under rural and traditional structures, can arise in the course of demographic change. In response to those changes, including baby boomers in formal volunteer work, it seems to be a feasible strategy that currently lacks in sufficient, resilient management tools, which has become particularly evident under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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7. Competing interests



The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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